

## KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

### An Indian Spiritual Vision

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**Abstract:** Jose Eroorickal makes an Indian reading of the spiritual vision of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. The spirituality of Chavara was a combination of Indian, Eastern and Carmelite features of mysticism. Rooted in these age old traditions, Chavara and his companions took to a life of contemplation that led them to intense apostolate. Initially, the writer explores the basic characteristic features of the mystics such as self-purification, ecstasy, visions and mystical union and goes on to survey the general features of Indian spirituality dwelling on *satya*, *darsan*, *the various margas*, *tapas*, *ashrama* and *sannyasa*. In this background, he reflects on the mystical experiences of Chavara, which are expressed in his *darsanam*, *vasam*, and *sallapam* by means of which, he practised the Christian spiritual values in the Indian society, which was very unique for his times.

**Keywords:** spirituality, Hinduism, religions, culture, Chavara, *karmayogi*, experience, *tapas*, *karma*, Carmelite, mystic, ecstasy, truth, mysticism, *ashrama*, *sannyasa*, *beth rauma*.

#### 1. Introduction

India is a multi-religious nation where almost all religions are practiced. We are living in a world of multiple religions, cultures, and value systems. In this pluralistic context we find that all these religions have their own spiritual ideals, which differ from one another. This peculiar diversity prevents us from distinguishing a pure Indian spirituality. All believe in the ultimate Reality and the aim of man's life here on earth is destined to reach that Reality through a spiritual transformation.<sup>1</sup> Hinduism, the major religion among them, is practiced by more than 75 per cent of Indians and dates back to more than 3,000 years. Indian civilization is one of the most ancient civilizations and Hinduism is regarded as the major contributor to India's culture and reality.

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<sup>1</sup>See J. M. Koller, *The Indian Way*, London: Taylor and Francis, 1982, 62.

Every corner of India is dotted with temples, mosques, churches and gurudwaras, which are visited daily by thousands of pilgrims and devotees for prayer and worship. Every home, every road, every rickshaw bears a spiritual symbol. Every few days there is a festival to celebrate. Life and religion are inseparable in India. Different religions live together in such a way that they give and take from each other in matters of faith enriching each other through exchanges of views and philosophical discussions. Religious plurality is a wealth of Indian culture.

Chavara, an Indian Christian saint, is a unique mystic. He is remembered for his challenging pioneering initiatives and contributions in different spiritual, social and literary fields. He is known as the founder of religious congregation for men and women, champion of education, defender of the harmony of the church, spiritual reformer, social reformer, and man of several other welfare activities. Hence, he is known to the Kerala society as a great *Karmayogi*. But these external activities were one part of his life as he was also a mystic who was endowed with God-experience.

The spirituality of Chavara was a combination of Indian, Oriental/Eastern and Carmelite features of spirituality. Our focus in this paper will be on how he was able to live the ideal of consecrated life abiding in the spirituality of India. Participation in the ultimate Reality through spiritual transformation of human existence has guided most Indian philosophy and religious thoughts, giving shape to the Indian way. This participation and spiritual transformation is only possible with a *darsan* or profound vision according to the Indian mind, and the attainment of this *darsana* is through *tapas* and *nishkama karma*. Rooted in these age old traditions, Chavara and his companions took to a life of contemplation leading to intense apostolate. Several writers have reflected on the unique Indian way Chavara. In this paper, we shall discuss only certain important concepts, and texts to show how Indian spirituality influenced Chavara. Following is a short analysis on the basic characteristic features of an Indian Christian and Carmelite mystic.

## **2. Basic Characteristics of Mystics**

### **2.1. Self-Purification in Tears**

The initial spiritual experience of the mystics leads them to know themselves. The divine glory and blessings awake in them a sense of unworthiness before God. They feel that even a shortcoming is an

obstacle on their way to sanctity. So they will cry out as Prophet Elijah: "I am a sinner Lord" and like Peter they cry out saying: "Lord I am a sinner, do not come near me."

We see the depth of Chavara's mystical teachings from two of his works: *Atmanutapam* and *Dhyanasallapangal*. The progress of Chavara's mysticism can be seen in his poetic works like the *Spiritual Canticle* (*Atmageetangal*) and spiritual colloquies (*Atmasallapangal*), which are his daily meditations in prose. From what he has written sharing his experiences mostly in poems, we see that the culmination of his experience in his spiritual union. But to reach there, he had to pass through various stages of God experience.

Mystics, who are in union with God, experience the gift of tears. On the one hand, these tears are attributed to their feeling of unworthiness before God on account of their draw backs. On the other, these tears are symbols of their deep sense of the love of God and his closeness.

## 2.2. Ecstasy and Visions

Ecstasy is part of a process in which the soul establishes union with God and experiences joy in an unlimited manner. It happens not only during their personal prayer, but also when they experience the providence of God in their personal life and in the wonders of the nature. The visions occur on account of the ecstasy. There are three kinds of visions that the mystics usually receive: sensuous, imagery and intellectual. As they are identified with the life and personality of Jesus, they have also certain experiences of the sufferings and the events related to the life of Jesus in visions. Chavara experienced long ecstasies before the Eucharistic Lord. He found happiness in spending time with the Lord. In certain moments, Chavara experienced his elevation to the chamber of heavenly abode. He writes:

Perfect One, it was your Holy Will impeccable  
that let me be born on earth  
A human being, me, impoverished you raised  
To the highest skies, Your Abode.

## 2.3. Mystical Union

The life of many Christian mystics shows that Mystical union, which is also called Spiritual marriage one of their mystical experiences. The mystics are drawn up to an intimate and personal relationship with God. As a bride is united to the bridegroom the soul of the mystic is

lost in the Divine. The relationship between God and mankind is given a mystical symbolism in the Book of the Song of Songs. It is a rich source for those who compare mystical experiences to the spiritual marriage in the unitive stage of perfection. The mystics like Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena are best examples before us in this regard.

Chavara had similar divine spousal experiences that he referred to Jesus as the beloved bridegroom: "I must come to my saviour Jesus Christ, my beloved Bridegroom, to beg pardon for my sins."<sup>2</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* includes various mystical expressions of Chavara, which are directed to Jesus. Mostly, these expressions burst out in different ways, on account of his intimate relationship with Jesus as his 'groom'. The unique contribution of Chavara to the spirituality of the mystical espousal is found in his contemplation of the Calvary episode.<sup>3</sup> Chavara describes the way of the cross as the solemn royal procession of the Divine bridegroom towards Calvary, which is the wedding hall.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Some General Features of Indian Spirituality

Although spiritual life is defined and described in different ways in different contexts and traditions, generally, it is man's sharing in the life of God. The question that arises in this regard is how can man share in the life of God. From a scriptural point of view, Paul describes spirituality as a "life according to the Spirit (see Rom 8; Gal 5:25). A spiritual person is one whose whole being and life is led or influenced by the Spirit of God, wherever the person is.

The following virtues related to Indian spirituality are important ways to understand how Chavara practised them in his spiritual life and subsequently assisted him in his welfare activities for the Church and society.

#### 3.1. *Satya*: Truth

The concept of *satya* or truth (Absolute, God) has a fundamental role to play in the Indian spiritual thought. According to absolutistic principle, there is only one reality or truth. The question of religiosity of Indians is explicable with the quest for the Absolute. This is presumed to be the fundamental principle and the objective of human

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<sup>2</sup>*Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

<sup>3</sup>See *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 21-23.

<sup>4</sup>See *Compunction of the Soul*, 70-105, lines 13-24.

life as India understands. Concepts like Being, Reality, or Self designate to Absolute (God) in Indian philosophical tradition; a quest for union of being (human soul) with Being (God) or unreal with Real or self with Self. The achievement of this goal of the human soul is a spiritual realization, which is fulfilled when one attains the truth. A Christian *bhakta* is in search of truth by following his master Jesus who is his absolute truth. A perfect seeker of this kind is restless until he finds its end through appropriate means. In the life of Chavara, a constant search for truth is seen and the Indian spiritual elements like *darsan* (vision), *tapas* (austerity), various *margas* (ways) have come to his help and have influenced his spirituality and apostolate.

### 3.2. *Darsan*: Divine Vision

The word *darsan* denotes a profound divine vision. In India it is generally accomplished through temple worship, pilgrimage, festival celebrations and the honouring of saints and *sadhus* (sages). It not only means that the gods keep their eyes open to a devotee but the devotee also must do the same in order to reap divine blessings, and to know the divine secrets. Generally, for Christians, Jews and Muslims, hearing the Word of God and responding to it is all important. But in Hinduism, the emphasis is more on the vision aspect – a gaze at the divine image.

A spiritual transformation is possible through a profound divine vision in Indian spiritual tradition. For an ordinary believer, the *darsan* of a sage has greater importance because he considers the sage a holy man who experiences God face to face in his day to day life. This God experience is the result of one's intense ascetical practices (*tapas*). He live a life of discipline (*yoga*)<sup>5</sup> and genuinely follow subsequent paths (*margas*). Rooted in these spiritual traditions of India, Chavara used the word *darsan* in his reflections on mysticism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Yoga is one of the most important features of Indian spiritual traditions. It aims at the mystical union of the self with the Supreme Being in a state of complete awareness and tranquillity through certain physical and mental exercises. It promotes physical and spiritual wellbeing. The word yoga is derived from 'yuj', which mean to join, to attach, to yoke, etc. See B. Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Routledge, 1995, 616-618.

<sup>6</sup>See *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto III, 17.

### 3.3. *Margas*: Ways

The *margas* are four possible ways to liberation or salvation described in the *Bhagavad Gita*.<sup>7</sup> Liberation is ultimately union with the divine reality. The *margas*<sup>8</sup> are *Jnanamarga*, *Bhaktimarga* and *Karmamarga* and *Rajamarga*.

However, the first three *margas* are considered the most important. *Jnanamarga* is the path to reach the ultimate reality through knowledge. *Bhaktimarga* is the path of devotion to one's chosen manifestation of the divine (*ishtadeva*),<sup>9</sup> more precisely, devotion in love and adoration of *Brahma* (God). *Bhakti* means attachment, or fervent devotion to and love for *Brahma*. The term stems from the root *bhaj*, meaning to partake of.<sup>10</sup> It is a love response to God's gracious love. The object of *bhakti* is *Bhagavan* (God). The word *karma* literally means deed or action, but it implies the entire cycle of cause and effects. According to the law of karma, every human action – in thought, word or deed – inevitably leads to results, good or bad, depending upon the moral quality of the action. The *Gita* attempted to give it a spiritual interpretation shifting the objective of karma. Thus, *niskamakarma* is an action done, but with no detachment to the fruit of the action.<sup>11</sup> This means not to be desirous of or attached to its fruits; the action is performed not based on the desired effect for yourself, but on the general welfare. *Rajamarga*<sup>12</sup> is the royal path discussed in *Yogasutra*, a methodical system for attaining perfection. It is essentially the path of meditation, that is, of being able to remove

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<sup>7</sup>It is regarded as one of the holy scriptures of Hinduism. It is also known as a classical work and an episode in India's Great epic *Mahabharata*. The main story of *Mahabharata* is the war between the *Kaurava* and *Pandava* families. In this episode there was a dialogue between Sri Krishna and warrior Arjun of the *Pandava* family. Seeing own relatives on the other side (opposition), Arjun planned to withdraw from the war. But Sri Krishna – inspirer of good – advised him not to withdraw and inspired him to fight. The dialogue between these two is depicted as the symbol of fighting evil by performing one's duty as a warrior. See R. C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, London: Oxford University Press, 1979, 5-8.

<sup>8</sup>Some authors speak of these as *yogas* instead of *margas*, but both concepts refer to the three ways of human life of which Hinduism speaks.

<sup>9</sup>See "Bhakti," J. Bowker, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, New York: Oxford, 1997, 141. *Brahma* is the word used for God in Hinduism.

<sup>10</sup>See Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism*, 138.

<sup>11</sup>Zaehner, *Bhagavad Gita*, 2: 47.

<sup>12</sup>See Walker, *Hindu World*, 617.

one's consciousness from its awareness of this world of illusions and to focus only on the ultimate reality.

### 3.4. Tapas, Ashrama and Sannyasa

*Tapas*, *ashrama* and *sannyasa* point to a life of renunciation. The powerful austerities of the ascetics were known as *tapas*.<sup>13</sup> Although the English terms like asceticism or austerity are employed to translate *tapas*, it has a wider connotation. *Tapa* is the creative energy within God.<sup>14</sup> On this Manu writes: "Whatever is hard to be attained, whatever is hard to be reached, whatever is hard to be performed, all (this) may be accomplished by austerities; for austerity (possesses a power) which it is difficult to surpass."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it is one of the best means to attain supreme bliss.<sup>16</sup>

Chavara and his companions envisage a *beth rauma* (house on high) where they could be closer to God. In India, these are *ashrams*, which as a space, are abodes of ascetical practices. The word *ashram* derives from the Sanskrit word *shrama* which means, 'to exert', to achieve a goal.<sup>17</sup> Literally *ashram* means 'halting or resting place'. The word therefore, signifies a stoppage or stage in the journey of life wherein one rests, in order to prepare for the further journey to attain the final life or goal that is the Divine.<sup>18</sup> The term *ashram*, in its strict sense, is applied to the four stages of life in Hinduism.<sup>19</sup> *Vanaprastashram* (retreat to the forest), the third stage of life, is equal

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<sup>13</sup>The term 'tapas' has its origin from the Sanskrit root 'tap', which means, to heat, to shine, to do penance, etc.

<sup>14</sup>See *Taittiriya Upanishad*, I: 1, 8-9.

<sup>15</sup>See *Manusmriti*, XI, 239. These are the Laws of Manu. Manu is a semi legendary Hindu lawgiver. It is one the standard books in the Hindu canon, and a basic text for all gurus to base their teachings on. This 'revealed scripture' comprises 2684 verses, divided into twelve chapters presenting the norms of domestic, social, and religious life in India (ca. 500 BC) under the Brahmin influence, and is fundamental to the understanding of ancient Indian society.

<sup>16</sup>See *Manusmriti*, XII: 104.

<sup>17</sup>See B. G. Gokhale, *Ancient India*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1970, 120.

<sup>18</sup>See P. Pattathu, *Ashram Spirituality*, Indore: Satprakashan, 1997, 70.

<sup>19</sup>According to Hinduism, every Hindu has to pass through four stages during his earthly life. They are known as ashrams: *Brahmacharya*, (studentship), *Grhastha* (householder), *Vanaprastha* (retreat to the forest), and *Sannyasa* (life of renunciation).

to the hermitage of a *rishi* or sage.<sup>20</sup> It also denotes a place where holy, learned and experienced men lived with disciples in order to meditate and to share their experience of God. But for some, *ashram* life is not only a withdrawal from the world, but also a means of service to society.<sup>21</sup> For such people, *ashram* symbolizes a life of contemplation and service. It is for this reason that some Indian Christian religious congregations call their houses and monasteries *ashrams*.

*Sannyasa* is a state of life in which a person is totally detached from everything in the universe. Possessions, attachments and thoughts of a *sannyasin* are focused ultimately on *Brahman*.<sup>22</sup> *Sannyasa* is a Sanskrit word derived from the combination of two terms, *samyak* and *nyasah*, meaning total abandonment.<sup>23</sup> For Hindus to embrace *sannyasa* means death to all belongings<sup>24</sup> and a *sannyasin* is also called *tapodhana*, as his wealth is *tapas*. Thus spiritual realization takes place when one achieves union with Brahma. It is in this state that one declares '*aham brahmasmi*' (I am Brahman), *tat tvam asi* 'Thou art that'. This is somewhat similar to the view expressed by St. Paul when he says, 'it is no longer I, but Christ lives in me.' This is regarded as an experience of a mystical union.

*Upanishads* are Hindu spiritual treatises composed in Sanskrit between 800 and 400 BC in prose and verse. They contain the core of Hindu Philosophy.<sup>25</sup> They constitute not only the scriptures but also are a veritable source of mysticism. The very word *Upanishad* means

<sup>20</sup>See Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism*, vol. I, 84.

<sup>21</sup>Sri Buddha even positively approved social service as a duty of monks, so they had hospitals and education centres. The famous University of Nalanda was one of these. See T. Kochumuttam, "Indian Monastic Traditions," H. C. Perumaly, ed. *Chavara Death Centenary 1871-1971*, Kottayam: Deepika, 1972, 101.

<sup>22</sup>See M. G. Bhagat, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 1976, 43; see also C. Kanichai, *Sannyasa*, Alwaye: no year, 3.

<sup>23</sup>There are different names used in Indian terminology to denote a *sannyasin* (renounced or detached person), such as *swami* (lord), *yogin* (one who practices yoga), *muni* (one who practices internal and external silence), *rishi* (one who attains divine experience), *tapodhana* (one who possesses the treasure of meditation), etc. See M. Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism*, Roma: Gregorian University Press, 1982, 369-73.

<sup>24</sup>See Pattathu, *Ashram Spirituality*, 111.

<sup>25</sup>See "Upanishad," J. Ferguson, *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mysticism and the Mystery Religions*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1976, 202.



to sit near. It conveys a symbolic expression of acquiring true knowledge (*jnana*); while sitting at the Master's feet the student ardently listens to him. The teacher communicates wisdom that is in him. When the *Upanishads* were composed, there were no writing materials, no printing facilities; all knowledge was handed down orally. The *gurukula* system<sup>26</sup> of Indian society was developed from this ancient tradition. The students stayed with the teacher and the teacher would speak of his experience, develop its profound truth. The disciples would hear attentively and afterwards note certain high points of the teaching.<sup>27</sup> The *Upanishads* are records of knowledge acquired from experience.

As Indian born, it is quite natural for St. Chavara to imbibe the Indian spiritual values and to be impact on his life. By following the Indian way of three *margas*, Chavara set goal to attain a profound *Darsan* of the Divine in the innermost heart.

These key concepts and thoughts of Indian spirituality greatly influenced Chavara, who lived in the culture and religiosity of Indian society. His was a life dedicated to the *darsan* of God. The ardent 'longing to see' (*darsan*) is a sign of his profound *bhakti* (devotion) reflected in his poetic writings.<sup>28</sup> *Darsanaveedu* or *Tapasubhavanam* which designates the Indian way of hermitage is a symbol of God's presence. Though the original vision of a *darsanaveedu* or *tapasubhavanam* was shared by the other two CMI co-founders, Chavara carried forward its spiritual values and inspired others.

Let us look at Chavara's experience of the *Darsanaveedu* in his meditative hymns:

You are my father you are my fortune  
There is no other treasure for me, but in you  
You are my love, all my good fortune  
If not with you, how could I live my life  
My very breath, my food, my drink

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<sup>26</sup>It was an ancient educational system where a group of students stayed with the *guru* or teacher for a particular period to acquire knowledge. According to this system, it was not merely elementary education, but an integral knowledge that helped them to learn everything for their life. It is also called *brahmacharya ashram* – the primary stage of life, according to the Hindu ashram system, before entering the *grahastashram* – married life.

<sup>27</sup>A similar system of education was followed for the priestly training in Kerala in ancient times. Father Thomas Palackal, the co-founder of CMI congregation, at Pallipuram during the time of Chavara.

<sup>28</sup>See *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto III, 17-22.

What can I find solace but in you.<sup>29</sup>

Here his personality is reflected as standing alone in the presence of God in a face to face embracing vision, *darsanam*. A person like Chavara, gifted with mystical insights, can have such profound intuition. On the glorious and mighty presence of Christ in the tabernacle, Chavara considers the one who is enthroned there to be none other than his own Loving Father (*snehamulla appan*): My Lord is enthroned near me in the tabernacle of this chapel. He is inviting me to Him in order to render me grace for my salvation, to forgive me, to listen to my petitions, to satisfy my needs. He is telling that he will bestow on me profusely whatever favours I am in need of. He promises to listen to me whenever I approach him with supplications. 'Colloquies with the Heavenly Father' (*Dhyanasallapangal*) presenting a typical exposition of the Indian disciple 'sitting near the teacher and listening' is an Upanishadic inspiration.

#### **4. Mystical Experiences of Chavara**

One of the key features of the spirituality of Chavara is mysticism. Mysticism is a vast concept one can perceive it only by looking at it from different perspectives. Christian mysticism is one of the classic means in spirituality by which one communes with the Divine. This could happen through a simple prayer or intense meditation. By these means, one achieves great spiritual heights as we see in the lives of saints like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross and numerous unknown believers who had mystical experiences. Considering mysticism in various religions, Parrinder notes: "... the religious experience of the ordinary believer is in the same class as that of the mystic; the difference is one of degree but not of kind."<sup>30</sup> Not all contemplating people are mystics, but contemplation with deep divine experiences elevates one to the state of mysticism.

The two works of Chavara<sup>31</sup> provide us ample instances of his mystical experiences through simple method of meditation and he himself formulated it saying, "Meditation is a free and friendly colloquy with God... For, if it is a conversation with God, it presupposes a friendship with God. When friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without cessation. If there

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<sup>29</sup>See CWC, *Atmanutapam*, 10.

<sup>30</sup>G. Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World Religion*, New York: Ebsco, 1976, 23.

<sup>31</sup>See *Compunition of the Soul* and *The Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*.

is love, conversation goes unlimited.” Chavara’s definition highlights three important elements: friendship, conversation, and love between God and the devotee. He uses different words to show how a true devotee is close to God, namely *chernnu* (joined), *onnichu* (together), *onnichirunnu* (seated together), to express intimacy or unity with God. This unity comes from deeper friendship, conversation and love. By this usage, he emphasizes the genuine and stable relationship of God and man.

In his *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Chavara presents to us three progressive stages of God-experience that he experienced: seeing (*darsan*), abiding or staying (*vasikkal*) and loving conversation (*sallapikal*). This moment of experience is often compared to the transfiguration experience of the disciples described in the gospel.

#### 4.1. Seeing: *Darsanam*

For Chavara, *seeing* is the intense perception of the presence of God the Father. Sometimes, this perception is the result of his active and intense gaze at the tabernacle. He describes the appearance of God the Father and the gaze of a soul with the image of the prodigal son (Lk 15:1ff): “Behold! my bounteous Father seated on His throne before the tabernacle in the chapel.”<sup>32</sup> In the light of the intense awareness of the presence of the Lord and his own unworthiness, he laments his shortcomings in the following way:

Oh, it is long time since I saw the beautiful face of my Father.  
 Oh my soul! See the numerous hired servants in Your Father’s  
 place...  
 Seeing them why should you be troubled in heart?...  
 Have a look at the Father’s palace and the mansions therein  
 with their graceful high walls.  
 Don’t you see a movement at the door!

In the subsequent expressions of his feelings, he also speaks of beholding the face of the crucified Christ. Each of the wounds of Jesus, he felt, telling him stories of love and sacrifice.

#### 4.2. Staying: *Vasam*

In the intensity of his experience, Chavara has a similar feeling of Peter at the transfiguration of Jesus; he speaks of abiding (*vasam*) with Jesus.

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<sup>32</sup>*Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

Peter said: "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (see Mt 17:4; Mk 9:5; Lk 9:33). To the question posed by the Psalmist 'who shall enter into the house and stay', Chavara's response is significant: God will not stay in the heart of a sinner because God is holy. The One who comes to stay must be given a dwelling worthy of him. Similarly, if you want to stay in love you must sit in love. You must sit facing the other. This abiding is similar to the posture of Mary at the feet of Jesus, listening to his words of life (see Lk 10:39). She is immersed in the presence of Jesus and has forgotten everything else. With utmost concentration, the devotee sits at the feet of her Master and picks up every word that her master says and copies them down in her heart. It is at the feet of the Master that one finds silence and concentration, the characteristic features of a true *bhakta* in India.

### 4.3. Speaking: *Sallapam*

*Sallapam* (speaking, talking) in the spiritual literature of Chavara refers to the genuine talk between friends. *The Colloquies* of Chavara is a collection of his *sallapam* with Jesus, his friend. He bases his reflections on various episodes from the Gospel, like the thief who was crucified at the right hand side of Jesus, the man without a wedding garment at the banquet, the prodigal son, etc. Seeing Jesus on the cross, the thief made a genuine acknowledgement of his mistakes in the following words: "for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Lk 23:41b). With great humility, Chavara looks at himself in the place of the thief and makes this prayer: "Speak, O Lord, to my soul also that I shall be with you in the paradise of Your grace. Sustain me in your grace and forgive me my sins."<sup>33</sup> Chavara reaffirms several times the necessity of the great virtue of humility in our prayers. For instance, he pointed out that the lack of humility to ask for a garment, denied the man a place in banquet hall (see Mt 22:11-12). Through the parable of the prodigal son, God is presented as our *appan* (see Rom 8:15)<sup>34</sup> loving Father and as children we are free to ask Him what we need.

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<sup>33</sup>*Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 8.

<sup>34</sup>*Appan* is a vernacular word similar to the word 'abba'.

## **5. Conclusion**

We have tried to have a comprehensive picture of Chavara's mystical life in the Indian perspective of spirituality. In this respect of all described aspects above what we have come across regarding the life of St. Chavara we find a unique Indian mystical saint. His literary works, namely the poetical and spiritual works stand as great sources of his own God-experiences. These works stand not only as literary works but also as means of transforming a literary world to a spiritual world. In short, from all that has been said we can legitimately affirm that St. Chavara was a mystic born and brought up in the Indian spiritual context. His life was a means and source of translating the Christian spiritual values in accordance to the Indian society. For that his life and personality is very unique even today.

